



Department of Justice

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DOJ Increases Efforts to Combat Sexual Harassment in Housing During the COVID-19 Pandemic

LEXINGTON, Ky. — U.S. Attorney Robert M. Duncan, Jr., is asking anyone who has witnessed or experienced sexual harassment by anyone with control over housing, including landlords, property managers, maintenance workers, loan officers, or others, to report that conduct to the Department of Justice.

The COVID-19 Pandemic has impacted the ability of many people to pay rent on time and has increased housing insecurity. The Department of Justice is aware of reports of housing providers trying to exploit this crisis by sexually harassing tenants. Sexual harassment in housing is illegal, and the Department of Justice intends to investigate such allegations and pursue enforcement actions where appropriate.

“The Department of Justice remains vigilant in investigating wrongdoing related to the COVID-19 pandemic, including using all available enforcement tools against anyone who tries to capitalize on the current crisis by sexually harassing people in need of housing,” said United States Attorney Duncan. “Such behavior is both despicable and illegal. My Office intends to take aggressive action against this misconduct, when we find it in the Eastern District of Kentucky.”

The U.S. Attorney’s Office will work closely with state and local partners to identify such incidents of sexual harassment in housing.

The Justice Department’s Sexual Harassment in Housing Initiative is an effort to combat sexual harassment in housing led by the Civil Rights Division, in coordination with U.S. Attorney’s Offices across the country. The goal is to address sexual harassment by landlords, property managers, maintenance workers, loan officers or other people who have control over housing.

Launched in 2017, the Initiative has filed lawsuits across the country alleging a pattern or practice of sexual harassment in housing and recovered millions of dollars in damages for harassment victims. The Justice Department’s investigations frequently uncover sexual harassment that has been ongoing for years. People need to be aware that sexual harassment by a housing provider can violate federal

law and that the Department of Justice may be able to help. The Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination in housing on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, familial status, national origin, and disability. Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination prohibited by the Act.

The Department encourages anyone who has experienced sexual harassment in housing, or knows someone who has, to contact the Civil Rights Division by calling (844) 380-6178 or emailing fairhousing@usdoj.gov. Individuals who believe they may have been victims of discrimination may also contact the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Kentucky, by calling (859) 233-2661.

U.S. Attorney Duncan has released a PSA regarding the matter, and it can be found here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=551-hYetMM>

Individuals may also file a complaint alleging harassment or discrimination in housing with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, through its website or by calling (800) 669-9777.

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